still pastily amorphous in spots; rather dull reading all together. . . . What causes so much trouble in writing this book is also what causes them (I am thinking chiefly of Gheon) considerable trouble in listening to it: it remains an anachronism amidst everything that we are thinking, feeling, and wanting today. But despite this, I cannot not write it; and from this crushing trial I issue, after all, less depressed than strengthened.

8 *December*

Stendhal's correspondence.

Stendhal has never been a real sustenance for me, yet I constantly return to him. He is my cuttlebone; I sharpen my beak on him.

La 628, E 8.[26] People talk of Mirbeau s psychology and of Zola's naturalism or realism because both of them discuss shamelessly what used to be hidden. One must admit that they talk better about these things than about all the rest—than about what everyone discusses. The most successful pages are those in which he keeps closest to the tone and gait of conversation; certain ones, in this regard, are almost perfect; he never rises above them. He gets angry and becomes enthusiastic, one never knows just why, but sincerely, I believe, and like a child; he likes to get angry; it is the best in him. He writes in the heat of£ passion without reflecting, notes his quakes like a seismograph. The satiric spirit completely prevents the development of the ironic spirit in him.

Gourmont's *Dialogues des amateurs.* The desire to prove himself intelligent makes him constantly talk nonsense. I can well imagine that he impresses and why, and that many readers don't dare resist for fear of thinking themselves less intelligent than he. Nothing

so stupid as that fear of being taken in! I have seen the sorry fruits of it in Georges Rondeaux and in Gerard.

He speaks of literature and in general of "the things of the spirit" with a rather great competence and a taste that is most often delicate (excellent, for instance, his dialogue on romanticism and Lasserre) — but as soon as he deals with alcoholism, virtue, depopulation, criminality, etc., he puts forth nothing but monstrosities and shows that he has never known life except through books.

"It must be rather hard, all the same, to go off to prison when you haven't deserved prison/*

"And when you have deserved it, is it any less hard?

And does one

[26] Mirbeau's novel by this title recounts a motor trip that serves as a pretext for a review of the author's opinions. The title comes from the license-plate of the car.